

Lessons Learned and Future Directions

The process for developing lessons learned and future directions took place in three steps. First, WSL staff brainstormed a listing of lessons learned and recommendations. Then the full LCW reviewed and commented on this listing, striking some, editing others, and adding some of their own. Finally, WSL staff worked with a LCW subcommittee to further refine the lessons learned and recommendations, and to add substance to each taking them from a bullet point to a more descriptive statement.

Communication – Awareness of LSTA

- Lessons learned: The transition from LSCA to LSTA has further opened federal library funding to all types of libraries. Knowledge of the availability of these funds to small libraries, rural libraries, and non-public libraries has been limited in spite of attempts to widely distribute announcements.

Messages need to be honed and audiences targeted more precisely for the message to reach its intended target and to be effective. Timing is an important consideration in distributing information to academic and school libraries. Messages need to avoid jargon, be repeated and reinforced. If groups are targeted in the correct manner, they will respond.

People can't always find the information they need about LSTA funded programs and grants.

Newer communication technologies are becoming more widely available. While it sometimes seems that these technologies are not effective, it must be remembered that as librarians enter the field, the overall comfort level with new technology will continue to increase. Videoconferencing is one example of new technology that is now more widely available but has not been widely used. It has its place, but project staff need to recognize situations appropriate for its use. A variety of communication technologies must continue to be employed while the use of this or other newer technology continues to be developed.

- Progress: The mailing of announcements has become more focused over time. As one example, early grant cycles sent materials directly to officials within the superintendent's office at each of the 296 school districts. It was later learned that many school librarians continued to be unaware of these opportunities. The mailing of announcements as part of the latest grant cycles was delivered to each of the approximately 1,800 public school libraries in the state. Announcements throughout this period of time were also distributed to the Washington Library Media Association that represents school libraries/media centers.
- Recommendation: Continue to find more effective ways to increase marketing and outreach of the grant program to non-public libraries. An internal marketing plan should be developed and consistently used.

Target academic libraries, special libraries, and small rural public libraries. In addition to grants, increase marketing and outreach about statewide programs and initiatives. WSL staff administering technology grants should promote LSTA opportunities more heavily among rural libraries.

LCW needs to be aggressive and be held accountable for working with their individual constituencies. A handbook should be developed detailing the constituencies for each of the LCW positions.

Targeted e-mails should be used as well as general broadcasts on listserv.

- Recommendation: Staff need to develop a standardized, efficient process to communicate content and technical issues with clients. A template should be developed that can be used by all WSL consultants for posting working documents, reporting on project progress, and publicizing information on the status of projects and timelines.
- Recommendation: Web sites are an important part of consulting and library development. They are no longer just an interesting thing to do. Encourage WSL consulting staff to use Web sites as part of their project management. Ensure that WSL Web pages provide a consistent look and feel through the use of a core set of common elements. At the same time, maintain enough flexibility to allow for pages to be creative and interesting. Web sites should use common, lay terminology and avoid jargon.

Seek means of tracking use of resources including Web site usage. Seek meaningful data, not just data that is easy to get, e.g., hit counts.

- Recommendation: Increase cost-effectiveness of WSL programs and projects. Minimize the number of reports that are printed and distributed. Place reports and other information on the Web for downloading. This will allow WSL to more effectively allocate its resources and will allow those end users that are truly interested in receiving the information access to that information.
- Recommendation: Think carefully about the comfort level of users and the level of technology available to those users in their daily work. Be very selective in the use of videoconferencing or other applications that use newer technology.

Communication – Responsiveness

- Lesson learned: Feedback from the library community is needed if LSTA funding is to have the greatest impact possible.
 - Progress: Both the 1997 and 2000 survey of Washington libraries asked a number of questions regarding specific grant cycles and different aspects of the LSTA program in Washington state.
 - Recommendation: Continue to gather feedback on specific characteristics of the LSTA and grants program using focus groups, surveys, and other methods. Refine the program based on the information gathered.

Community Input

- Lesson learned: LCW has proven effective in advising the WSLC and the WSL staff and shaping library development in Washington.
 - Recommendation: Continue to use the LCW for library development planning and prioritization of the use federal of LSTA funding in Washington state.

- Lesson learned: Project advisory committees have proven effective in the planning, development, implementation, and oversight of various LSTA funded initiatives.
 - Recommendation: Continue to use the project advisory committees for the planning, development, and oversight of LSTA funded initiatives.

Customer Service

- Lesson learned: While much consulting can be done by phone, email, videoconference, and other technological means, face to face contact and personalization of service is still important.
 - Recommendation: Create a balance between the need for consulting and the demands of project management. Develop a clear expectation of the roles of WSL consultants and what is expected in terms of both project management responsibilities and consulting.

Customer Service – Events and Scheduling

- Lesson learned: Library staff have a hard time traveling to various training events. Initiatives that brought training programs to many locations across the state were highly valued and appreciated. Staff felt they had more opportunity to attend and could more easily arrange for backup coverage of their library, if needed.
 - Progress: Training and other program activity is provided in a variety of locations across Washington state. Even though an attempt is made in every project to reach many locations across the state, the project budget, availability and cost of trainers, and time constraints all affect success in this regard.
 - Recommendation: Provide programs/initiatives that reach all areas of the state. Programs should be held in as widely dispersed geographical locations as possible.

Also provide non-project related training to the library community based on needs. The need for all types of training for libraries is important.

Learning Resources – Availability

- Lesson learned: One of the useful outputs of many projects is the documentation of “best practices”. Availability of this information allows libraries to avoid duplicating much effort. Libraries can build upon each others’ efforts and the good work previously completed.

The development, use, and distribution of “best practices” are important aspects of the successful implementation of new or enhanced library services statewide.

Project staff, advisory committees, and project partners need to share what is being learned from the implementation of projects. Benefits accrue to libraries that are actively participating on advisory committees or to those that are implementing a project. Other libraries will also benefit from the review of “best practices,” “lessons learned,” and information about project implementation. This will allow all libraries to see what works and what pitfalls may be avoided.

- Progress: Initiatives/projects such as Early Learning and Digital Imaging have Web sites that contain “best practice” information. Other projects such as Diversity have the development of “best practices” as one of the objectives of the project. The identification of “best practices” is not a uniform objective of projects at this point in time.

- Recommendation: The development of “best practices” should be incorporated into all projects that anticipate that they will encounter a significant learning curve to achieve a successful outcome.
- Progress: Information about projects is made available at a variety of levels but the level of information shared is inconsistent across projects.
- Recommendation: The information growing out of projects needs to be put online or otherwise made available in a more consistent fashion. Reports and other information need to be available after the project is done. Project staff need to continue to reinforce the “lessons learned” and “best practices” messages by repeating them and getting these messages in front of people using a variety of methods.

Take time in LCW meetings to share best practices from projects. Invite people from projects and committees speak about projects, best practices, etc.

Learning Resources – Needs Identification

- Lesson learned: Practical continuing education needs are not always being met. Identification of needs provide a common frame of reference.
- Recommendation: Develop grants, training, and other events that meet the needs of the library community. Library development personnel should work closely with training personnel. Provide greater coordination of the timing of grants, training, and other events in order not to overwhelm the library community and provide the opportunity for all who want to participate to do so.

Three actions are proposed. First, implement a program of grant training for library staff. Second, work to prepare libraries and their staff for collaboration with other libraries or with community agencies. Third, train library staff on how to do program evaluation.

Marketing

- Lesson learned: Marketing of LSTA projects is in its infancy. Delivery of services to the end user should always make reference to the WSL as the provider or facilitator and IMLS as the funding source. As audiences are targeted, and statewide training and mentoring of the library grows, LSTA-funded and WSL supported projects and services will become more visible.

Delivery of services to the end user in a transparent way, where the end user cannot identify the role of WSL in the delivery of the service, may significantly impact the perceived value of WSL.

- Progress: Several projects funded through LSTA have been highly visible and highly successful, e.g., The SDL Project and the Find It! Project. These projects have won acclaim from many segments of the library community and the general public. Many supporters both in the library community and the general public have pointed to LSTA projects as a justification for the continuance of the WSL.
- Recommendation: The WSL, LCW, and LSTA statewide initiative committee members must effectively promote statewide initiatives/grants and keep the library community and the public aware of these accomplishments and their value.

LSTA funded projects should carry the "Washington State Library" and "IMLS" brands. This will increase constituency support and help citizens of Washington to comprehend the added value that the agencies implementing these projects bring to the delivery of

information statewide. This should include not only the WSL Web site and other published products but should also include the Web sites and products of the local libraries receiving LSTA funding.

- Recommendation: Programs need a marketing component in addition to detailed budgets and other project detail. Ultimately, if only the participants know about the program, its impact will be very limited.
- Recommendation: Each program needs materials developed for use in local library implementation. These templates may be in common to several projects and be linked via each projects Web site. Two examples of such templates are a marketing template and a project implementation/process template.

Partnerships

- Lesson learned: Participation in collaboration and consortia are important ways to strengthen libraries and expand purchasing power.
 - Recommendation: Work to help libraries collaborate with each other. Encourage the formation of consortia to serve small rural libraries. Encourage the formation of consortia across library types.

Partnerships – Community Partners

- Lesson learned: The development of community partners is an important way to increase the visibility of the library, knowledge of the wide variety of services available through local libraries, and impact on the community.
 - Progress: Projects should focus on partnerships among the library community and with community based agencies.
 - Recommendation: Work to help libraries collaborate with community organizations that have similar interests. Encourage the formation of partnerships to serve targeted constituencies.
 - Recommendation: Make interagency cooperation a requirement for appropriate grants.

Partnerships – Involvement In Projects

- Lesson learned: The involvement of LCW members and interested library staff across the state on statewide initiative advisory committees brings new perspectives, a wider variety of expertise, increased support and more grounding in reality. It provides for project ownership, better guidance, more of a true partnership and increases the connection with numerous people in the library community.
 - Progress: As of June 2001, thirteen advisory committees were assisting WSL on a variety of projects and issues. These advisory committees were composed of more than 140 members of the Washington library community and others interested in these projects and issues.
 - Recommendation: Continue to include LCW members and non-library partners on advisory committees. Provide more notification of opportunities for participation. Recruit more broadly. Provide interest form on Web site for people to indicate their willingness to participate on committees or otherwise in projects.

Planning

- Lesson learned: It is important to have a proposal process that is flexible enough to address emerging issues. While the process of developing and approving initiatives is successful in gathering ideas from the entire library community, the process starts so far in advance of the date of implementation that is difficult to quickly address new issues, trends, and needs.
 - Progress: The proposal process has been adjusted to more easily allow the development of activities that address newly identified high priority issues of the library community. Introduction of “out-of-cycle” proposals is now allowed with the sponsorship of a LCW member. Recommendation for approval of the “out-of-cycle” proposal is dependent on the availability of LSTA funding and the approval of the WSLC.
 - Recommendation: Better document the “out-of-cycle” proposal process and the steps for acceptance of this type of proposal and the review of these proposals.
- Lesson learned: It is important that there be a plan in place that acts as a guide to the future. The plan acts as a blueprint from which the WSL works with the Washington library community to achieve common goals.
 - Progress: The proposal process requires the proposal document to identify the relationship to Statewide Planning. Most individual grant cycles also incorporate an application question that ask about the relation of the proposed project to local planning and Statewide Planning.
 - Recommendation: The Five-Year Plan needs to be more focused than the previous plan. Use the amendment process to keep current with emerging trends and issues. Looking forward and recognizing trends and upcoming issues is an important part of the effective implementation of this strategy. Keywords for development of the new Five-Year Plan should be focus, demonstration of progress, impact, and accountability.
 - Recommendation: There should be a greater connection between goals and strategies identified in the Statewide Plan/LSTA Five-Year Plan and the work of the WSL and the LCW. In working with LCW, the WSL should use the Statewide Plan as a guide. Recommend greater use of the plan and a better tie in as evaluation of proposals occur. The plan should provide the desired outcome and as such, the yardstick for how we measure progress.
- Lesson learned: Identification of trends and future issues (horizon scanning) is important for the wise use of funds. This role is inclusive of the WSLC, LCW, and WSL staff.
 - Recommendation: Continue to monitor trends in the library community.

Administrative – Determination of Needs

- Lesson learned: Doing a needs assessment prior to project implementation is an important step in developing a successful project.
 - Recommendation: Limit or better coordinate surveys of the library community so that the library community is not over-saturated with requests for feedback on various projects and tasks.

Seek effective means of assessing the needs of the library community and follow through with appropriate training. Piggyback on the needs assessment work of other agencies/organizations (their surveys, etc). Develop better methodologies to get the

information and feedback that WSL staff and advisory committees need. Seek alternatives to surveys, such as focus groups.

Administrative – Project Development

- Lesson learned: Significant value accrues when consistent methods and processes for project management are employed.
 - Recommendation: Processes, resources and tools should be shared among project managers, committees and others to keep project related logistics moving quickly and effectively.

Administrative – Project Tracking

- Lesson learned: Better tracking of projects and collection of information results in initiatives and projects that can be marketed and reported in a more effective manner.
 - Progress: Some initial efforts have been made to address this lesson learned.
 - Recommendation: A more consistent and coordinated process with tools/templates should be developed. Project results and outcomes should also be more thoroughly identified during project implementation.

Collection of information in electronic format allows easier manipulation of the information and reduces duplicative data entry into documents, spreadsheets and databases.

Administrative – Project Identification

- Lesson learned: Most projects are composed of several distinctive phases each requiring the oversight and involvement of WSL personnel. Many small projects spread staff resources thinly and reduce the ability of the staff to respond to issues that arise. The ability of the staff to take on other projects such as library consulting also becomes constricted.
 - Progress: LCW and the WSL Consultants Team work together to find a balance between worthy large and small projects so that projects can be staffed adequately.
 - Recommendation: Projects should be larger both in scope and in funding in order to have greater benefit to broad sections of the population. These projects should have as their foundation an underlying collaboration between many segments of the library community and of society.

Workloads need to be balanced such that assigned staff is in a position to manage the project effectively. At a minimum, WSL staff act as a project liaison assuring the interests of the state and that the requirements assumed with the acceptance of federal funding are followed.

- Lesson learned: It is very difficult to keep aware of the needs of the unserved and the underserved population of the state. General consulting with individuals and libraries is an important way to maintain awareness of these needs.
 - Recommendation: Consulting staff need to spend more time in general library development through consulting with libraries, doing evaluations and reports, and horizon scanning. One issue that needs additional discussion is how to best address the issue of meeting the need for library services in areas not yet served or which are greatly underserved. The formation of new libraries/partial library districts and any roles for WSL should be one part of this discussion.

Administrative – Project Administration

- Lesson learned: Problems with effective communication and logistical support can occur with off-site project managers.
 - Recommendation: Limit the use of off-site WSL employees to the minimum essential to complete critical time-sensitive tasks.
- Lesson learned: Under the present structure, each project manager has been required to learn all aspects of project management. There is a steep learning curve for such tasks as issuing “request for proposals” and writing contracts. Project managers also spend considerable time doing lower level tasks. These tasks interfere with the project manager’s focus on the content of the project.
 - Progress: A special projects manager position within WSL has been developed to more effectively coordinate and support projects.
 - Recommendation: Develop models for how to develop, manage, complete, monitor, and evaluate various tasks.

Consider hiring an administrative support person to handle lower level tasks such as the processing of travel reimbursements.

The next section of the evaluation report was produced by the Information School at the University of Washington. This part of the report describes in detail the impact upon libraries and the geographic distribution of LSTA funding and grant awards throughout the state.